

The Village Setting

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When walking through a mountain village, one often looks from an upper lane down upon several tiers of houses beneath, since the buildings compactly hug the slope vertically rather than stretch in a narrow row at the same level. This gives a good opportunity to observe the roof types, one of the simplest ways used by Greek folklorists in the classification of village homes. There are, in general, two main types of roof: the sloping, which predominates on the mainland, and in which the slopes from either side of the central roof beam may or may not be of equal length. If they are equal, one has the eagle type or saddle-back type. The second general type is the flat roof, called *doma*, found chiefly on the islands and characteristically Mediterranean. The houses with a sloping roof can be further divided into two types: the one-story house of the plains and the two-story house of the mountains. These types have been well described by George A. Megas and Angelike Chatzemichale, as well as by other students of Greek architecture.

The peasant, of course, will not tell you that his house is of the two-story, sloping-roof type. Instead, he will want to show you where he carries on his daily activities after he has served you some refreshment in the part of the house reserved for such honors. He will introduce you to some of the domestic animals almost as though they were members of the family; he will show you how his wife makes bread and will call to her, "Helene, come out here and show our guest how you put the loaves into the oven." He will want you to see the few tools he uses in repairing a wagon, an implement, or a piece of harness. Now and then, if the scenery warrants it, he will stop and show you the view and ask you if you ever gazed upon a more beautiful sight. He will apologize for the mud in the yard, reminding you, "we are just village folk and this is just a village home." When he tells his daughter to get busy at the homemade loom to show you how she weaves the coarse cloth, he will casually ask, "Do women in America weave as pretty cloth as our women in Greece?"

Should his house be one of the few with a flush toilet or with a homemade privy superior to the others in the village, this may be the first wonder he will proudly display. There is no rhyme or reason to the tour of the small farm, nor should there be. Somewhere en route, perhaps while one is still enjoying the sweets offered upon arrival, the family photographs will be passed around, special attention being centered upon the young man living in Chicago, Los Angeles, or Pittsburgh, who regularly sends remittances back to his family — or at least he did until he married an American wife. One is immediately aware that this is a home, a place where people live rather than merely a house consisting of building materials fashioned into some kind of suitable pattern.

Nevertheless, anyone interested in carrying away some lasting impression of a Greek home needs to pay attention to the house itself. I was fortunate

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Saturday; in other villages it may be on Thursday evening or Friday. Now and then one may come upon a group of women making use of a neighborhood oven where combined efforts mean greater economy of fuel. More and more, village bakers are relieving housewives of the baking chores, although the women must prepare the loaves and other food for the oven. Throughout rural Greece the bread is usually dark, since only about 2.5 percent of the bran is extracted.

It is hard to think of Greek food, however, without thinking of the resinated wine that is served to guests with the meal. Foreign travelers never fail to react quite strongly to the taste and properties of this unusual drink. Z. D. Ferriman in his *Home Life in Hellas* (1910) describes it as

a beverage whose odour has been compared to various things — furniture polish and melted sealing-wax among others. A high dignitary of the Church from Constantinople said of it many centuries ago, that it resembled the juice of the pine tree rather than that of the grape, an observation that is strictly true. To the novice it is extremely nauseous, and some people never acquire the taste. To the Greek it is nectar. He lauds its flavour of turpentine on account of its alleged peptic qualities.

On holidays and special occasions the men, as already noted, may drink

ouzo. In addition to her preoccupation with food, although it is served simply and in limited variety, the housewife also has to spend much time preparing clothes for her family. This holds true even though the villagers throughout Greece no longer wear the highly embroidered costumes of two or three generations ago and have adopted the Western style of dress. Some villages, such as Megara near Athens, with an eye on the tourist dollar, are exceptions to this rule, for their streets become resplendent on Sundays and holidays as some of the residents stroll in traditional dress. There are, however, little touches of costume which vary from one region to another. The nomadic peoples, described earlier, can always be identified by their black garb; the Turkish men of Thrace by their baggy trousers and fezzes and their women by veils and ballooning Turkish trousers.

But the Greek peasant styles are becoming more uniform. In the northern Peloponnesos the women wear as a standard work garment a skirt and a blouse, along with heelless pigskin moccasins, pointed at the toe. In many other parts of Greece a chemise, with or without sleeves, is common. These garments and their underwear are woven and sewn at home; the "woolies" which are worn in cold weather are knitted by the women. On Sunday the women wear a "best" dress, which they may have bought in town or at least modeled on a dress someone else obtained there. Underneath is the customary slip. Regular Western shoes with heels are a part of the dress-up outfit. When the women are working outside they wear headscarfs, with the

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older women wearing dark brown and the girls white. Black scarfs are for mourning only.

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In the Peloponnesos the men buy their trousers and coats but wear home-made underwear and shirts. They have a good suit for Sunday which, when it becomes threadbare, they wear every day. The socks are woolen and are made at home. Sandals are often worn in the fields while regular shoes are reserved for occasions when the men dress up in their best. The cap is such a favorite headgear in the Peloponnesos that if a villager sees a man with a hat he will assume that he is an outsider. The children dress like the adults, although the boys wear short trousers.

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Behind the garments lie many long patient hours of painstaking work. The women make their own woolen thread but buy the cotton thread. They spin when otherwise unoccupied, for they feel that they must be busy with some handiwork except on Sunday, a day on which they do not even touch a needle or spindle. In many villages one still finds that practically every house has its own loom, stored during the summer but busy in the winter as each woman tries to supply her family's needs and as the unmarried girls work on their dowries. These looms eat up so much thread that spinning never seems to be completed.

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Younger women, seeking some release from this onerous task of making so much cloth at home, use their meager funds for the purchase of store-bought goods. They even exchange with the town merchants some of the priceless costumes, which have been handed down through many years, for factory-made cloth that gives them a more fashionable feel.

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In the Pelion district around Volos the only examples of popular art being produced today are the blankets and household linen which the women continue to make on their crude looms. According to Kitsos A. Makres, who has written extensively on this subject,⁹ they continue this weaving because of a romantic, unconscious desire to give the same decorative color to the house that they have known all of their lives. He points out that buying the industrial materials is more economical but that the aesthetic urge keeps the women's handicrafts alive.

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The most detailed study of national costumes and the art of weaving and embroidering in Greece has been made by Angelike Chatzemichale.⁹ She and others associated with her have tried to stimulate the increase in such handicrafts, for which there is a ready sale in Greece and abroad. She finds that the main variations in materials used are between the mainland and the islands. On the mainland the goods are handwoven from wool to stand hard wear, an exception being in Epirus where cotton and linen materials are made for household use. In the cities, such as Salonica and Volos, silk has long been popular. On the islands, however, few woolen materials are used since the preference is for cotton, silk, and felt.¹⁰ The villages of the mainland, particularly in the mountains, have had to be much more self-sufficient

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and were therefore limited to the wool, which was available and which the women could work, even for underwear and sheets. Cotton, much more difficult to spin and weave, became known in the eighteenth century to the plains villages visited by outside traders, but it was considered a luxury.

In Macedonia the women use the looms chiefly for making heavy blankets and for the dowry items, but not for clothing. According to the home economists there, the families now buy underclothes, stockings, shoes, extra sheets, pillow cases, and towels. A woman will still knit undershirts for the men and pullovers for children out of the woolen thread she has spun for herself. She will buy material and make garments for children who go to school. At about sixteen years of age a girl will buy material and take it to the village seamstress to be sewn up into special garments for her dowry. But new garments are not the only problem. The woman is kept busy darning everybody's clothing, and few are the work clothes without two or more patches.

In many villages Friday is washday, demanding heavy work for which machinery is not yet a substitute. For the woolen garments the women follow the centuries-old method of beating out the dirt with sticks or paddles around the fountain or along a running stream. Most women prefer to carry the clothes to the water, often at some distance from the house. Warm water may or may not be used, depending upon the fuel supply. Women are especially interested in improvements in the water supply, and the forms these take seem to follow a set sequence. First, the women start going to a spring or a stream for the water, carrying one large jar on their heads and another in their hands or else loading casks full of water onto a donkey. Then someone, either the municipality or a prosperous Greek-American from that village, arranges to have the water piped from the spring or stream to a central fountain. To this spot, much nearer than the former one, all of the women come once or twice a day as occasion demands.¹¹ The third stage is that of piping the water by the municipality to different sections of the village so that there are neighborhood spigots instead of a central fountain. The fourth stage, that of piping water to individual homes, is not yet even talked about in most villages, although here and there one finds a native son returned from abroad who has enough capital to drill a well or otherwise arrange for his own private water supply. This is the exception rather than the common expectation. The villages of Greece, like those of other countries, demonstrate the close relationship between the extent of woman's toil and the presence of a convenient source of water.

FARM TASKS

The yard of a Greek village home is never a spic and span showplace; it looks lived in twenty-four hours a day. The geraniums in flower pots on the window sill and the basil growing next to it give a touch of color. Before

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12. A widow at the loom, Salamis. For two years there must be no levity in her presence.

[p. 272-H]

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into thread at home by the women. In each household the women weave the rugs that are a necessary part of a girl's trousseau with wool from their own sheep—at least as long as it lasts.

Goats are raised for their meat and, in households with young children, for their milk. Adults rarely drink the liquid milk. As a form of pasteurization, the villagers always bring the milk to a boil before serving it, and the children drink the milk while it is still warm. In the more prosperous households, the women use both sheep's and goat's milk as an ingredient for a kind of milk and egg custard pie and for a sweet milk and rice dish served with sugar and cinnamon. But these foods are in a class of special treats and are served mostly in spring and early summer when the milk supply is at its height. Goat meat, however, is often a less elegant substitute for lamb on special occasions. Kids are raised for the Christmas feast, and the measure of the success of a household's participation in the village's *paniyiri* (patron saints' day festival) is expressed by the number of animals (goats and sheep) slaughtered for the feast. The more visitors to the house, the more enjoyable the day is felt to be; the more visitors, of course, the more meat is eaten. When asked whether the *paniyiri* had been successful this year, one farmer answered, "Oh yes; we slaughtered three!"

Chickens are also an additional source of food and sometimes of income for the villagers. Families keep about a dozen fowl. They roam the house yards, (there is an effort made to keep them off the village street, and all hands join in shooing them out of the houses), and roost at night in the stone stables or in the ground-floor storeroom of the houses. The villagers like eggs, and eat them in various ways, but their production is also, of course, seasonal. The chicken is most significant for the part it plays in Greek village hospitality. The villagers will say, "Come to our house for a proper meal (*trapezi*). We'll kill a chicken for you." And that is quite literally what they do. Occasionally enough chicks survive to create a surplus from the household's point of view. Such poultry is sold to buyers who come around from the nearby towns. Chickens are rarely considered an extra source of food for ordinary household consumption.

A watchdog is a common addition to a household's collection of farm animals. The people of Vasilika believe that thievery is a constant danger to be guarded against and prefer, if possible, not to leave their household compounds totally unguarded. Whenever possible, some member of the household stays around the property even if it means sacrificing a visit to a feast at a neighboring village. If all the members of a household are out working in the fields, a dog is left at home. Ordinarily, however, dogs are tied up all day and the farmer, just before he goes to sleep, frees the dog to stand vigil through the night. Dogs are trained to bark at any unusual noise or at the approach of any person who is not a member of the household. The villagers, especially the women, are very much afraid of the dogs and consequently avoid going out at night. On one occasion, when the women and girls of the village had sat together in the church until long after dark, they set out for home with groups of neighbors clustered together, holding on to each other, walking fast, and shuddering and exclaiming with fear at the clamor made by the dogs. It should be added that in actuality, there are few thieves in the village and that the dogs rarely bite anyone.

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291 schoolgirls. Since the same clothing is usually worn indoors and out during the
511 winter, small boys and girls wear cotton pinafores over their outer coats in order
• [289] to prevent too fast soiling. Some mothers knit sweaters for their children, but
gloves are not worn for warmth either by children or by adults. Uncomfortably
cold hands are expected throughout the winter, and during this season, as they
enter a house, people frequently walk directly to the front of the fire and extend
their hands towards the flame. Some of the young girls wear thin gloves, for
show rather than for warmth, when they go to church. Children, like their
parents, are now expected to have new clothes at Easter, and, if possible, for
other holidays as well. They must be neatly dressed for school. A few of
Vasilika's children wear torn, patched, faded clothing out of economic neces-
sity.

Urbanity vs. Convenience

369 The urban acquisitions relieve some of the work load and add to the
511 variety of life, and the villagers frequently express satisfaction at having the
312 new conveniences and the new relief from boredom. But convenience seems to
406 be welcomed less for its own sake than as a by-product of goods and practices
that are primarily valued for their air of urban sophistication, of "progress."
For example, most of the wells in the village have no windlasses to ease the labor
of bringing up the pails full of water. Women simply keep a rope attached to a
pail, lower the pail into the well, and use the rope to lift it out again, hand
over hand. The water level in many of the wells is low, so that drawing a pail
of water is hard physical labor which must be done at least twice a day, but the
women did not agitate for windlasses in the way they did for cement basins, for
obviously, windlasses have no urban cachet about them. They do want running
water in the homes—an urbanism—and it will, incidentally, relieve them of the
drudgery of drawing so much well-water, but for a generation, the presence of
a few windlasses in the village did not inspire other families to acquire them.

369 The overt recognition on the part of the villagers that they admire and
354 accept the new items because they stand for progress and sophistication and not
511 entirely for whatever utility they may have is exemplified by the comment of one
of Vasilika's less prosperous inhabitants whose living conditions were among
the least favorable in the village. His house did, in 1959, have electricity, how-
ever, and he had one naked bulb hanging in the center of his one small upstairs
room. This man described for us his feelings about a recent visit he had made to
the *paniyiri* of a mountain village which had no electricity. "I couldn't stay there
more than a day," he said. "They had no electric light, and I cannot live like
that any more. I have become a European," he concluded, with a smile, using
the term that Greeks use for the inhabitants of Europe west of the Adriatic.

369 A second reason for the acceptance of new uses for cash is simply the rivalry
511 among Vasilika's families. If one family with urban connections has something
556 new, other families make an effort to get the same thing. One of the effects of
the process is that some families whose incomes barely enable them to subsist

38 · THE FAMILY: DOWRY AND INHERITANCE

583 wedding to take the *rukba* and the house furnishings she has received as gifts
[585] to the groom's home. The groom hires a truck to do the job, not because there is
[286] so much furniture, but because of the quantity of *rukba*. A Vasilika girl is ex-
pected to have woven at home approximately thirty sheets, six light blankets,
two heavy woolen carpets, five lighter woolen floor coverings, five coarse woolen
blankets, four mattress covers, ten carry-all bags or sacks, two heavy ornamental
table covers, one red-and-white striped and one blue-and-white striped tablecloth
with twelve napkins to match each of the cloths, six cotton face towels, and two
long cotton towels for the tray in which loaves of bread are left to rise before
baking. To this accumulation she will add several pieces that are bought from
[438] itinerant merchants and embroidered at home. Also purchased, usually in town,
are white sheets, pillow cases, and turkish towels as well as the material for
[352] about six pairs of curtains. Furniture consisting of a wooden wardrobe, a bed, a
[431] table, and some chairs may be added, as are the cooking and serving utensils
given to the girl as gifts. The colorful collection fills a small pick-up truck, and
585 the sight of one of these on the road with laughing and singing young men
crowding whatever space is left is a sure sign of a wedding. On Sunday morning
the groom's party, including his marriage sponsor (*kumbaros*), arrive at the
house of the bride. The *kumbaros* leads the group to the house, only to find
the door closed and locked. He begs that the door be opened. The girls inside
giggle and demand 1,000 drachmas to open the door. After some bargaining,
the *kumbaros* gives a five-drachma piece and the party comes in. It is the
[608] *kumbaros* who rents the bride's white wedding gown, provides the wedding
[262] crowns, the large white candles which are held at the ceremony, and the *kufeta*,
the sugar covered almonds arranged in small packages of white netting, tied with
a white ribbon, which he distributes to each of the guests after the ceremony.
[574] After the wedding feast, for which musicians are hired so that the guests can
[534] sing and dance, the bride is accompanied to the groom's home by her brothers
[152] and sometimes a sister. The women, including the bride, all cry as they leave
[178] the girl with her new husband.² But even among farmers these customs are
changing, and in recent years the bride and groom have taken to leaving the
wedding guests to go off on a short honeymoon.

Disposition of Dower Property

425 After the marriage of a farmer, the couple is settled in the man's village,
583 usually in the home of his parents. The groom has acquired some parcels of
182 land in his wife's village and a small hoard of cash as well. For the first few
[591] years of his marriage, he may go to his wife's village to work the land himself,
[427] or he may contract with his father-in-law or with one of his brothers-in-law to
[574] work it for him on shares. Either way he will have occasion to visit his wife's vil-
lage and to have some association with her father and brothers. In the meantime,
he is likely to be looking for an opportunity to exchange land with a farmer who

² The description of the engagement and wedding ceremonies is not complete.
The details selected are meant to give only an impression of the nature of these affairs.

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one crop farming in most cases develops many economic and social difficulties. The peddlers of finished goods in the villages absorb a large part of the trade. Usually in exchange for their goods they get live poultry and eggs.

The biological function. The morals are very strict in the village. In the grammar school the children are /22/ together but after the age of 15 one seldom finds boys and girls playing together. Only the close relatives have an approved right to dance with a girl or walk with her to the market. The boys get married at from 18-25 and the girls from 15 to 20 years of age. The period from 15 to 20 is spent by the girl in preparing her dowry. She is busy at the loom or in embroidery with the needle and thread. One of the desired qualities of the girl is to have her handmade stuff. The ultimate aim of the marriage is to have children. If it happens that she cannot have a child the first year of her married life then gossip will start in the village of her inability to bear a child. Just the way a farmer thinks about a cow not calving, so do the relatives and especially the father and mother-in-law. There is no limit as to the number of the children, as long as both husband and wife are healthy. The usual belief and excuse is, "God gave them and He will take care of them." Both young men and the young women are instructed as to their duties as fathers and mothers. Birth control has no place here. Nature takes care of it. The strongest of the children survive under the conditions that are available for living. Besides, to use any method of preventing birth to a child is thought to be an immoral act. Thus out of seven to eight children in a family about five survive up to the age of six and the rest /23/ die before then.

Size of families. The size of families varies in Megali Vrisi. One finds the largest numbers among Caucasians and the smallest among Thracians. The Caucasians used to live in compound families and still they stick to this idea even though it was broken down due to the new method of distribution of land. Even today one finds as large as 25 members in the family and as low as 3 members in the family. The compound family makes farming

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Stable & straw room	
built	6,000
Opened a well	3,000
Deposit in the savings	
bank	2,000
Total	46,160 = \$262

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From the above accounts we find that the largest single item of income is from wheat, which comprises over 60% of the whole income. This shows the importance of the crop not only for market but for the family consumption. Even in the expense accounts wheat used for /53/ bread is one of the largest items. Next to wheat come the animal products and the animals. One can easily see that the basic diet of the farmers is bread. 840 okes, or 2362.80 pounds of wheat makes 3544.20 lbs. of bread for four persons a year or 886.05 lbs of bread per person per year or 2.5 lbs. of bread daily per person. This is not the highest, but a little below the average.

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In the expense account we find clothing and building construction the largest expense items. The 6,227 drs. are spent, in a year, for clothing the family. This is above the average. Usually the clothing bill runs low, depending on the amount of cloth mothers can weave. Even though a large part of the cloth is produced in the village still the yarn has to be bought from the market.

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Next to this the largest cash bill is that of the doctors. This fluctuates from year to year, depending on the intensity and extensiveness of malaria and other diseases.

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The vegetable crop is another item that needs some explanation. The farmer produced only 15% of his vegetable consumption. Lack of knowledge of vegetable growing forces him to this extra expense. The soil and climate are suitable for him to raise enough varieties /54/ of vegetables the year around. This is proved by the fact that the vegetables he buys are produced locally by specialized vegetable gardeners.

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The προστώφον¹ is formed by a simple extension of the roof of the house downwards, and constitutes a very useful element for the needs of agricultural life in general, as it not only protects the entrance of the house from the rain, but it also provides a well aired and at the same time a well protected residence, where the family may gather, especially during the summer months. It is here that the family takes its meals and sleeps in summer time. It is here that the women put up their loom, spread and comb the wool, dry the maize and the sesame,² the onions and the other fruits.³ And it is also here that the oven is usually built.



Fig. 4 Old house at Ferral in Thrace

(G. Megas, Οικονομική Οικονομία, fig. 5)

The increase of space in the houses of both types is done in two directions: a) by extending the top beam of the roof and b) by extending the roof in the direction of the sides of the gable.

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In the first instance, and in the case of narrow-front houses, two successive rooms are formed in depth, the προστώφον remaining on the front of the house either open or closed (Fig. 5. Plate I b 1-3). In this last case, a new προστώφον is sometimes added, open on its front side (Fig. 1 c. Plate I a 6). In the case of the wide-front houses, two or more rooms are being formed on the same horizontal line (Figg. 3 and 6. Plate III-VII).

In the second instance and in the case of the narrow-front houses,

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1 [prostoon = open portico - Analyst.]

x 342 that the beams would be put in two successive lines, thus covering a
335 wider space.

This support is actually created by placing a long and resistant beam of 9-12 m. length, leading from the middle of the one short wall to the middle of the other, (μεινδ, Fig. 28 Plate IXa 1^a) or by using a shorter beam, but which is leaning on one or both its ends upon built supports called «pillieri» (single-pillieri or double-pillieri house) in Rhodes and Cyprus (Fig. 29 Plate IXa 1^b 1^c). This beam, especially when it is long, is supported in its centre or its one end by a wooden pole.

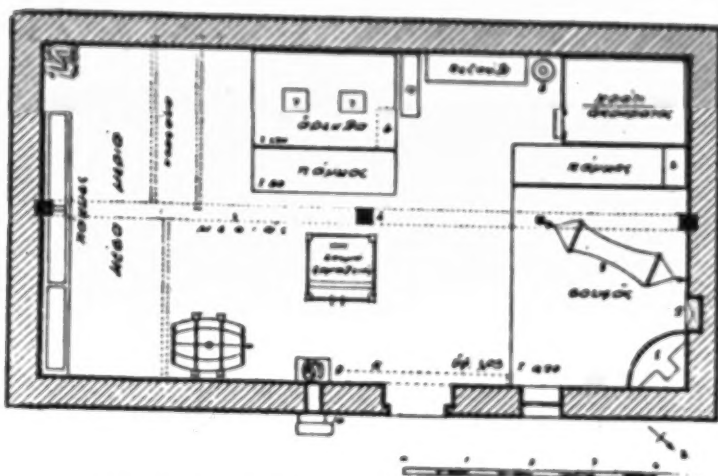


Fig. 28 Embona-Rhodes. Old house of Antony Emm. Antonakis

(G. Megara, Αρχαία κατοικία Αποδερνίου, N. 5)

Ploughing animals are stabled in the inner part (πίνα παρὰ).

Μεινδ (meina) — middle beam κλινη — bench κρεβατι — bed σενια — stove
Αγγαλιν — loom τ. — hearth π. — pole

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x 342 In places, however, where building stone is abundant, such as
333 in many of the Cyclades, the eastern part of Rhodes, Nisyros etc. in order to support the roof, a big arch (καμάρα) is constructed, which was probably introduced in popular house building, just as the construction of domes, through the construction of fortresses, prevalent

1) G. Megara, Αρχαία κατοικία Αποδερνίου, fig. 7 and 8. In Katavia of Rhodes these are called «antimissia».